

Message Text

SECRET

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41

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3107

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 1230

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, SY, XF

SUBJECT: SENATOR MCGOVERN'S APRIL 1 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASAD

1. SUMMARY. SENATOR MCGOVERN AND AMBASSADOR MET FOR OVER TWO HOURS WITH PRESIDENT ASAD APRIL 1. DISCUSSION FOCUSED ON ME IN AFTERMATH OF SUSPENSION OF KISSINGER MISSION. ASAD SAID SYRIANS HAD OPPOSED STEP-BY-STEP DIPLOMACY AND NOW SAW GENEVA AS ONLY ALTERNATIVE. US ATTITUDE AT GENEVA WOULD BE CRUCIAL. RENEWAL OF UNDOF MANDATE WOULD REQUIRE "NEW FACTORS IN SITUATION." SENATOR'S SUGGESTION THAT ASAD ALLOW SYRIAN JEWS TO EMIGRATE TO US DREW REPLY FIRST THAT THIS WAS MATTER OF SYRIAN SOVEREIGNTY, SECOND THAT SYRIA WOULD DO SO IF US FORBID THEM BY LAW FROM GOING ON TO ISRAEL AND THIRD THAT QUESTION WOULD BE SOLVED IF OVERALL SETTLEMENT WERE ARRANGED. END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING IS CONDENSATION OF SENATOR MCGOVERN'S TWO-AND-ONE-QUARTER HOUR MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASAD APRIL 1. SENATOR APPROVED AMBASSADOR'S DRAFT NOTES BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE.

3. KISSINGER MISSION. SENATOR ASKED PRESIDENT FOR HIS VIEWS REGARDING REASONS FOR BREAKDOWN OF KISSINGER MISSION. ASAD PREFACED REPLY WITH COMMENT THAT ONE

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REASON FOR MISUNDERSTANDINGS IN PAST HAD BEEN LACK

OF CONTACTS BETWEEN RESPONSIBLE AMERICANS AND LEADERSHIP OF SEVERAL COUNTRIES IN AREA. US AS SUPERPOWER HAD SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR WORLD PEACE. QUESTION OF WHY SECRETARY'S MISSION HAD "FAILED, BROKEN DOWN OR HAD BEEN SUSPENDED" WAS A DIFFERENT MATTER. ASAD TESTIFIED TO HIS EXCELLENT PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH SECRETARY, DEVELOPED OVER MEETINGS SINCE OCTOBER WAR, BUT SAID THIS DID NOT MEAN HE AND SECRETARY AUTOMATICALLY SAW EYE-TO-EYE. PERHAPS, HE SAID, SECRETARY'S MISSION COULD HAVE STARTED FROM DIFFERENT POINT OF DEPARTURE. WHAT MIDDLE EAST NEEDED WAS AN OVERALL PLAN TO BE EXECUTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH UNSC RESOLUTIONS. ASAD SAID HE HOPED THE SECRETARY'S OUTSTANDING EFFORTS FOR PEACE THROUGH STEP-BY-STEP DIPLOMACY COULD BE EVEN GREATER IN ACHIEVING AN OVERALL JUST SETTLEMENT.

4. SENATOR SAID THAT WHILE HE HAD NOT AGREED WITH SECRETARY, HE HAD SUPPORTED SECRETARY'S MIDDLE EAST EFFORTS AS LOGICAL -- THEY STARTED WITH SIMPLEST PROBLEMS AND MOVED TO MORE DIFFICULT ONES. ASAD REPLIED THAT SECRETARY WAS WELL AWARE OF HIS VIEW THAT REPEATED CYCLES OF SMALL STEPS ON SEPARATE FRONTS WOULD TAKE YEARS. MIDDLE EAST WAS IN A STATE OF WAR AND POPULAR WILL AND PRESSURES COULD NOT BE CONTROLLED UNDER SUCH PROCEDURE. HOW, ASAD ASKED, COULD ARABS ACCEPT AN APPROACH WHICH DIVIDED THE ARAB FRONT? WHY COULD NOT ONE SIMULTANEOUS STEP ON WHOLE ARAB FRONT BE POSSIBLE? IF US CONCLUDED THAT OVERALL SETTLEMENT WAS NOT POSSIBLE AND THAT A STEP EMBRACING ENTIRE ARAB FRONT WAS NOT POSSIBLE, REASON COULD ONLY BE ZIONIST INFLUENCE ON US POLICY. PRESIDENT THEN LAID OUT SYRIA'S POSITION AND DEMANDS ALONG FAMILIAR LINES.

5. SENATOR POINTED OUT THAT ALL US ADMINISTRATIONS SINCE 1948 HAD BEEN COMMITTED TO ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE AS A SEPARATE STATE BUT, SENATOR ADDED, US ALSO WISHED TO SEE BORDERS SETTLED JUSTLY AND PALESTINIAN QUESTION ADDRESSED. US POLICY INTEREST WAS IN GETTING THE SIDES TOGETHER WITH GOAL OF ASSISTING IN ESTABLISHING PEACE.

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PERHAPS IT WAS BEST NOW TO CONCENTRATE ON WHERE WE GO FROM HERE. PRESIDENT ASAD SAID SYRIANS VIEWED STEP-BY-STEP DIPLOMACY AS EFFORT "TO STAB ARAB INTERESTS AND BLOCK THE ROAD TO PEACE." HAD SEPARATE STEPS SUCCEEDED IN SINAI, THIS WOULD HAVE COMPLICATED OVERALL SOLUTION BY DIVIDING ARAB RANKS. IT IS AXIOMATIC, ASAD SAID, THAT NO ONE IN AREA COULD MAKE A SEPARATE PEACE.

6. GENEVA. SENATOR ASKED IF BEST WAY TO REACH OVERALL SETTLEMENT WOULD BE RETURN TO GENEVA. PRESIDENT REPLIED HE SAW NO ALTERNATIVE IN PRESENT ISTUATION BUT ADDED THAT EVEN AT GENEVA IT WOULD BE MOST IMPORTANT HOW US CHOSE TO THROW ITS WEIGHT. GENEVA WOULD FAIL, HE SAID, IF US CONTINUED TO FOLLOW ITS PREVIOUS PRO-CEDURES. PRESIDENT ASSERTED IT WOULD BE ENOUGH IF ISRAEL UNDERSTOOD THAT USG WANTED TO ACHIEVE A JUST PEACE IN THE AREA AND THAT THIS WOULD REQUIRE COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL FROM TERRITORIES OCCUPIED IN 1967 AND RESTORATION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS.

7. EXCHANGE OF TERRITORIES. SENATOR ASKED IF PRESIDENT SAW ANY ROOM FOR MUTUAL EXCHANGE OF INSIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF TERRITORY IN COURSE OF OVERALL SETTLEMENT. ASAD REPLIED THAT THERE WAS NO JUSTIFICATION IN TERMS OF GEOGRAPHIC SECURITY FOR ISRAEL'S RETENTION OF ANY PORTION OF LAND OCCUPIED IN 1967. MODERN MILITARY WEAPONARY AND TECHNOLOGY HAD OVERTAKEN "TOPOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS" OF THE PAST. MOREOVER, CREATION OF NEW ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS ON GOLAN SHOWED THAT ISREAL'S SECURITY WAS NOT THE BASIC ISSUE. THERE HAD BEEN 170 SYRIAN VILLAGES ON THE GOLAN. IT HAD NEVER BEEN A WILDERNESS. HEIGHTS OF GALILEE INSIDE ISRAEL WERE ISRAEL'S NATURAL AND LOGICAL SECURITY BORDER. THERE WAS NO REASON FOR ISRAEL'S SECURITY BORDERS TO BE ESTABLISHED AT ANOTHER'S EXPENSE. ANSWERING SENATOR'S QUESTION DIRECTLY, ASAD SAID "IT IS BETTER THAT THERE BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING. I ARGUE FOR RETURN TO THE FRONTIER OF 1967. ANY DEVIATION ONLY LEAVES ROOM FOR DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS AS HAPPENED WITH UNSC RES 242."

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NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED.

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P 021443Z APR 75

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3108

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8. PROSPECTS FOR PEACE. SENATOR SAID HE AGREED THAT ANY COUNTRY'S SAFETY DEPENDED ON ATTITUDE OF ITS NEIGHBORS. HE ASKED ASAD WHETHER, ASSUMING ISRAEL WITHDRAWAL TO 1967 BORDERS AND SOLUTION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS, HE COULD FORESEE POSSIBILITY OF ALL IN AREA LIVING IN PEACE. ASAD REPLIED, YES. PEACE WOULD BE GOOD NOT JUST FOR ISRAEL BUT FOR ALL. MUCH TIME HAD BEEN LOST AND AREA DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES WERE GREAT. IF WARS CONTINUED, HOWEVER, FUTURE WOULD NOT BE ON ISRAEL'S SIDE.

9. SENATOR MOTED THAT PROBLEM WAS A POLITICAL ONE. IT WAS NOT A QUESTION OF WHAT THE GREAT POWERS WOULD DO BUT RATHER HOW TO PERSUADE THE PEOPLE CONCERNED, INCLUDING US JEWISH COMMUNITY, THAT IT WAS IN ISRAEL'S INTEREST TO YIELD CERTAIN TERRITORY AND RECOGNIZE RIGHTS OF OTHERS. MORE HAD TO BE DONE TO MOVE PUBLIC OPINION TO A MORE COMPASSIONATE AND FAVORABLE APPROACH. IT WAS MOST IMPORTANT THAT ARAB SPOKESMEN COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH AMERICANS. IN THIS CONNECTION ASAD'S OWN MODERATE PRESENTATION HAD IMPROVED STANDING OF ARAB CAUSE IN US. SIMILARLY, SADAT'S SELF-DISCIPLINE AFTER BREAKDOWN OF SECRETARY'S MISSION IN EXTENDING UNEF EVEN THOUGH FOR LIMITED PERIOD AND IN OPENING SUEZ CANAL HAD BEEN VERY FAVORABLY RECEIVED IN US. WITHOUT SUCH ACTIONS, SENATOR SAID, US PUBLIC OPINION WOULD IND IT DIFFICULT TO SUPPORT "MORE IMAGINATIVE MOVES TOWARD PEACE."

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10. PALESTINIAN RIGHTS. SENATOR ASKED ASAD'S OPINION ON HOW BEST TO DEAL WITH PALESTINIAN QUESTION. ASAD REPLIED BY ASKING SENATOR WHAT ARAFAT HAD TOLD HIM IN BEIRUT. SENATOR SAID ARAFAT HAD SPOKEN OF TWO SITUATIONS, THE FIRST BEING A DREAM OF A UNIFIED PALESTINE IN THE DISTANT FUTURE, AND THE SECOND THE MORE PRACTICAL ESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE ON WEST

BANK AND GIZA. ARAFAT THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO MOST PALESTINIANS. THEN THROUGH THE PEACEFUL PROCESS OF PERSUASION THERE MIGHT ONE DAY BE A UNIFIED STATE. PRESIDENT NODDED AND SAID SYRIA SUPPORTED PLO'S PLANS AND HE HAD SPOKEN BOTH TO THE SECRETARY AND PUBLICLY ON THIS MATTER MANY TIMES. HE SAID THAT SENATOR MUST HAVE REALIZED THROUGH HIS MEETING WITH RAFAT THAT ARAFAT AND COLLEAGUES WERE PRACTICAL MEN, NOT TERRORISTS. SENATOR ASKED IF PRESIDENT CONSIDERED THAT A WEST BANK STATE INDEPENDENT OF JORDAN AND ISRAEL WOULD BE VIABLE. PRESIDENT ANSWERED FIRMLY, YES. ALL ARAB COUNTRIES, HE SAID, WOULD SHARE AND HELP.

11. UN MANDATE. SENATOR ASKED IF IT WOULD NOT BE WISE FOR UN FORCES TO REMAIN IN PLACE DURING PERIOD WHILE AN OVERALL SOLUTION WAS BEING WORKED OUT. PRESIDENT AGREED IN PRINCIPLE BUT ONLY ON BASIS THAT THERE WERE "NEW DATA AND NEW FACTORS IN THE SITUATION." PRESENT SITUATION WAS DANGEROUS AND CONTAINED HIGH RISKS IF IT REMAINED FROZEN. PRESIDENT THEN SUGGESTED AS ONE EXAMPLE OF "NEW DATA AND NEW FACTORS" THAT PERHAPS US CONGRESS COULD ADOPT A PLAN OR PASS A RESOLUTION AGREED TO BY BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES TO THE EFFECT THAT "A JUST PEACE REQUIRED WITHDRAWAL TO 1967 BORDERS AND SUPPORT OF PALESTINIANS RIGHTS." THIS, HE SAID, WOULD BE OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE FOR PEACE, WHEREAS IN PRESENT SITUATION THERE SIMPLY WAS NO POSITIVE ELEMENT. SUCH ACTION BY US CONGRESS AND PROGRESS AT GENEVA WOULD BOTH CONSTITUTE NEW AND HELPFUL FACTORS. WHEN SENATOR AGAIN PRESSED POINT OF UN FORCES REMAINING IN PLACE, PRESIDENT MERELY REPLIED THAT AT PRESENT NO EFFORTS WERE BEING MADE TO
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UNFREEZE SITUATION.

12. SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY. SENATOR SAID THAT ONE STEP MANY AMERICANS WOULD REACT TO FAVORABLY WOULD BE IF PRESIDENT WOULD CONSIDER PERMITTING SOME SYRIAN JEWS TO GO TO US. THIS WOULD HAVE A GOOD EFFECT AND BE A WISE POLITICAL MOVE FOR PRESIDENT ASAD. ASAD ANSWERED THAT THIS WAS QUESTION OF SYRIAN NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IN DEALING WITH ITS OWN CITIZENS. HE RECALLED THAT HE HAD MET WITH COUNCIL OF SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY SOME 18 MONTHS AGO. SPOKESMAN HAD CURSED ISRAEL AND DENOUNCED ISRAEL'S CLAIM TO REPRESENT SYRIAN AND OTHER JEWS. ANOTHER MEMBER HAD SAID THAT EVEN IF HE WERE GIVEN ALL OF ISRAEL HE WOULD PREFER HIS OWN SHOP IN SYRIA. SENATOR INTERRUPTED TO SAY HE WAS

ASKING THAT SYRIAN JEWS BE ALLOWED TO COME TO US; IT WAS NOT A QUESTION OF ENCOURAGING EMIGRATION TO ISRAEL. ASAD REPLIED THAT IT WAS NECESSARY TO REMEMBER THAT SYRIA AND ISRAEL WERE ENEMIES AND SYRIA COULD NOT RISK STRENGTHENING ITS ENEMY THROUGH INCREASING ITS MANPOWER. ASAD THEN SAID, "WE ARE READY TO PERMIT MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY TO GO TO US ON CONDITION THAT US FORBIDS THEM BY LAW FROM GOING ON TO ISRAEL. THIS WOULD BE A FAIR DEAL." SENATOR SAID JOKINGLY THAT ASAD'S AGREEMENT TO PERMIT JEWS TO EMIGRATE TO US WOULD HELP HIS (MCGOVERN'S) POSITION IN US AND GIVE HIM OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE GREATER INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY. PRESIDENT REPLIED WITH SMILE, "IN THAT CASE, YOU WOULD BE REELECTED THERE AND I WOULD FALL HERE." HE THEN CONCLUDED DISCUSSION OF SUBJECT BY STATING THAT WHEN FAIR SETTLEMENT COULD BE ARRANGED FOR WHOLE AREA, THEN QUESTION OF SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY WOULD BE SOLVED.

13. IN CONCLUSION, SENATOR SAID HE HAD BEEN TRYING TO LEARN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ON HIS TRIP AND TO AVOID PUBLIC STATEMENTS BECAUSE IT WOULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE FOR HIM TO WAIT AND MAKE STATEMENT ON HIS RETURN TO US. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSED THAT HIS MEETING WITH ARAFAT HAD BEEN PICKED UP AND LOOSELY INTERPRETED BY LEBANESE PRESS. FROM STANDPOINT OF HIS
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EFFECTIVENESS IT WOULD BE BETTER IF STATEMENTS ABOUT CONTENTS OF HIS MEETING WAITED UNTIL HIS RETURN TO US WHERE HE PREDICTED PRESIDENT ASAD WOULD BE PLEASED WITH WHAT HE WOULD TRY TO DO. PRESIDENT ASAD AGREED, GUARANTEEING THERE WOULD BE NO PUBLIC MENTION OF THEIR DISCUSSION.
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